

(Washington, DC) – U.S. Representative Chet Edwards, Co-chair of the House Army Caucus, today applauded House passage of the final 2010 Supplemental Appropriations bill funding military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

“While the challenges we face in Afghanistan are significant, I strongly believe we have a responsibility to give Defense Secretary Gates, Gen. Petraeus, and our troops the support necessary to see this mission through to ensure the safety and security of the American people. Afghanistan is where terrorists plotted to kill Americans on September 11th and they remain committed to killing Americans today,” **said Edwards, chairman of the House Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Subcommittee.**

The bill also strongly supports America’s veterans by including \$13.4 billion in funds for Vietnam veterans exposed to Agent Orange. Last October, Secretary Shinseki announced that the VA had found linkages between Agent Orange and three additional diseases: Parkinson’s disease, ischemic heart disease, and B cell leukemia. This “presumption” allows veterans who served in the Vietnam War and who have these diseases to have their benefits expedited.

Rick Weidman, director of government relations at the Vietnam Veterans of America urged Congress to *“back Secretary Shinseki with the funds needed to move forward to provide some measure of justice to these very ill Vietnam veterans and their families by making the funds available for vitally needed health care, and just compensation, to replace the lost earnings due to these illnesses.”*

Edwards concluded, *“Passage of this bill means that 86,000 Vietnam veterans or their survivors, who were previously denied disability compensation would now be eligible for retroactive payments. In addition, the VA anticipates that approximately 67,400 new claims will be filed. This bill supports both our active duty soldiers and our veterans, and sends the clear message that their country is grateful for their service today and will be grateful in the future, as they continue to deal with war-related injuries.”*

Edwards supported the surge of U.S. forces in Afghanistan over the past year. The 2010 Supplemental Appropriations bill will now be sent to the president who is expected to sign it into law.